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Northern bytes

by Will Nicholls

It's about time, in many different senses of the word. For instance, the time it takes to download the simplest things from the Internet in Cree communities. The time it takes to get connected to the Internet, which some Cree community members say can be more than three months. It's about the time after time that requests have been made to big telecoms to update and expand their services to the Cree communities. And finally, it's about time that the Crees officially complained to the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) about the impractical business models and shoddy service these companies provide in Eeyou Istchee.

The Eeyou Communications Network (ECN) and the Cree Nation Government (CNG) say the Cree communities are being underserved. It's not only the long waiting period to see if you can even get hooked up, but the long download times. One Mistissini resident said it took over 14 hours to download a movie. Given that most Cree communities are now connected by fibre-optic cable, there is no technical reason that this should be the case.

In researching Internet and cellphone business opportunities I discovered that a $130,000 investment would be amply sufficient to provide hi-speed wi-fi for everyone in Mistissini. That's just the equipment costs.

Paying the ECN for bandwidth on the fibre-optic system would cost about $8-9 grand more per month. Having 500 subscribers would generate about $600,000 per year. A more conservative 300 subscribers would mean $360G. First year costs would be about $238,000 plus set-up costs of an engineer and such. A rough guesstimate would be an additional $60,000 in the worst-case scenario leaving a potential profit of at least $60,000 for local investors in the first year alone. Adding in the potential sales of wi-fi equipment and cellphones (cellphone purchase and monthly service fees) would make that even higher.

One wonders why such giants as Bell, Telus or other service providers haven't jumped on this opportunity to add to their coffers and keep everyone happy. That's not counting the generous subsidies the federal government gives them to provide such services in the North.

Instead, we get slow Internet speeds, indifferent service and what appears to be intentional discrimination in comparison with non-Cree populations in the same territory. For example, Télébec, in December 2013, established an embargo on new services, stating they "cannot commit to any date to solve the current embargo."

The ECN/CNG submission to the CRTC says Télébec has significantly reduced Internet services to individuals and businesses in Cree communities. Why? The data shows Télébec has no problem providing high-speed Internet service to non-Cree industrial sites.

While service throttling decreases services to the Cree Communities at monthly rates that remain unchanged, non-Cree clients such as the Eleonore Mine face no such restrictions on their bandwidth. Information gathered for the submission says Eleonore Mine with 600 clients get 30% of Télébec's dedicated service, while 6,000 Cree and Jamesiens north of Matagami made do with the remaining 70%.

Many subscribers in Waskaganish and Eastmain have complained that when they move getting reconnected is a problem. Télébec treats them as new subscribers and they end up on the waiting list.

It's finally time that we take a byte out of the huge corporations that obviously see the north as a cash cow to be abused and taken for granted, and not as clients they should be competing to serve with basic telecommunication services. This time, let's do it ourselves.

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Kahnawake Powwow

photo by
Amy German

Celebrating life in Old Nemaska

by Joshua Iserhoff

I spent two weeks at Old Nemaska these past few weeks, enjoying the extreme weather: one day it was 31° C and the next only 5°. I must've burnt several boxes of mosquito coils as every day reminded me of childhood camping trips. I wasn't a modern city kid all the time: we lived modestly and our summer vacations were up the lake in Mistissini and at Gobanji.

I have such fond memories camping with my grandparents and I can still remember seeing Mistissini's sea creature. Perhaps stories of sea creatures ought to be a project for Ernie Webb. Weskitch Nemaska has its own sea creature and Deborah Wapachee has seen it. It could be a 30-foot long sturgeon, but this creature didn't have whiskers. It's a mystery and I am hoping to see it someday. I'll let you know when that happens.

I stayed in a cabin facing that of my dear friend, the late Lawrence Jimiken. I saw Virg, Emily and James using the front porch to cook for their meals. They informed me that Lawrence wasn't able to come, but that they were given the green light to use his porch. I was hoping he would appear with his love Frances but that never happened.

Then the news hit Old Nemaska, sadness filled the air and the prayers began. All day I heard, "Ayyy Lawrence…." Stories began along with the tears. My beloved and I had two Chinese lanterns and we lit both one for Lawrence and one for our friend Sharon Cheezo who passed away not long ago in Nemaska.

This Old Nemaska gathering was bittersweet but we know that Lawrence and Sharon would have wanted us to continue smoking our sturgeon, enjoying family time and feasting. These gatherings really do bring our people together, in the happy times and in the sad – we're there for one another.

In the end, living out on the land remembering our ancestors and sitting on Luke Mettaweskum's rock reminded me how important it is to pass time talking with our Elders. They say Luke was 121 years old when he passed; white records say 114, isn't that interesting? I loved my time at Old Nemaska and man, can that Jimbo work!

I have not had a summer vacation such as this in a long time. How rewarding it was to hear people laugh and to see our young people learning how to prepare and smoke sturgeon. Alice Jolly and Ellen Tanoush are fantastic teachers. My gramma Mary Iserhoff would marvel at Ellen (who stayed next door) because she had never seen someone work that hard. My sister Fawn mastered her sturgeon skills while I blamed my knife for slivering the fish unprofessionally. I was told that I was getting better so that gave me hope.

Nemaska won't be the same without Lawrence. Many at the band office will also miss him, especially at front entrance, where he could often be found smoking his cigarette. I'll smoke a sturgeon for him. Rest in peace, our friends, Lawrence and Sharon.

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Gearing up

Romeo Saganash wants to mobilize the Aboriginal vote for the federal elections

by Joshua Grant

MP Romeo Saganash marked the unofficial launch of his re-election campaign with a cocktail party and fundraiser July 6 in the Old Port of Montreal. Joined by New Democratic Party leader Tom Mulcair, Saganash said he intends to mobilize First Nations voters across Canada to turn out in large numbers for a crucial federal election October 19.

Saganash said he's been travelling extensively across his sprawling Abitibi-James Bay-Nunavik-Eeyou riding in northern Quebec since the last session of the House of Commons wrapped up in June, covering 3700 km in a single week.

"The work needs to continue where we left off," Saganash told *the Nation* during the event. "I did a lot of work on Nutrition North. I want to continue pushing to fix the housing crisis both in Nunavik and Eeyou Istchee and even south of my riding. I have two Algonquin communities, Kitcisakik and Lac Simon, that are in need of housing as well."

Saganash stressed that the different areas of his riding have specific needs and that anyone who works in and represents these regions needs to be sensitive to this diversity.

"It's a huge riding, very diverse in terms of its populations and in terms of its economies. The Inuit live in a particular geopolitical reality, as do the Cree in James Bay. Abitibi thrives on the natural resources of the territory and to the south we have the two Algonquin communities that still do not have a treaty. It's a lot of work and we need people who are mindful of those diversities throughout the territory. It's a good fit for me."

Saganash noted that he has a close working relationship with the chiefs and councils throughout the territory as well with mayors and elected officials in non-Native communities. He says repairing the decrepit James Bay Highway is a priority while citing climate change and northern infrastructure as two other issues that need to be addressed immediately.

"There's a new reality in the north," he said. "Climate change will have a major impact in the future and the new geopolitical realities that come with the melting of the ice in the north will create serious pressure. We need to look at these things very seriously and take a position on them. The north is going to have its importance for the future of all of Canada, not just for the future of northern Quebec. There needs to be major investment in infrastructure."

Asked why he chose the NDP over other political parties four years ago, Saganash said he always respected the party's policies and outlook.

"The NDP has very principled positions on many issues, whether it's the environment, whether it's Aboriginal peoples, whether it's the future of the north. Take for example our position on Bill C-51; I'm very proud of that position we took. It was important to consider every aspect and the impacts of that bill. Not just on human rights but on our Aboriginal rights and our right to contest what happens in our territories. Only the NDP has managed to always take these principled positions and that's why I can relate to this party very easily."

Even as the incumbent MP and with the NDP's recent surge to first place in national polls, Saganash isn't resting on his laurels.

"I never take anything for granted, especially not elections," he said. "This is the humble part that we enter

now. I'll take it one day at a time. I'll do my campaign as I did the last time, a serious one, and I'll participate in the debates. Hopefully the Cree will organize an English-language debate this time around!"

Saganash noted he's still waiting for a few of his opponents to be nominated; only the Liberal candidate Pierre Dufour has won a place on the ballot. He also mentioned the incredible opportunity he has had to effect change from within Parliament and the great opportunity First Nations across the country have to influence this year's elections.

"If Aboriginal peoples decide to come out and vote they can make a difference. The Aboriginal vote throughout Canada has been increasing over the years and people are starting to realize that whatever decisions are taken in Ottawa or in the provincial capitals of this country have an impact directly on their lives, directly on their lands, territories and resources, directly on their communities."

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Collateral damage

Anti-corruption legislation for mining industry raises ire of First Nations

by Joel Barde

A recently adopted federal law is causing alarm with First Nations who benefit from mining activity on their traditional lands.

The Extractive Sector Transparency Measures Act received royal assent December 2014. It will force Canadian mining companies to disclose payments exceeding $100,000 to domestic or foreign governments.

That means companies operating in corruption-plagued, mining-rich countries, like the Democratic Republic of the Congo, will now need to divulge payments they make to these governments. But it also means companies operating within Canada will be forced to release details on payments to First Nations governments.

Some worry the legislation is a way for the federal government to decrease funding to First Nations.

"The government wants to claw back some of the money they give First Nations. And this is one of the ways they are going to do it," said Jack R. Blacksmith, president of the Cree Mineral Exploration Board.

Blacksmith says some Cree communities receive money directly from mining companies, and that those deals are negotiated directly between the communities and mining companies, with the Cree Nation Government only serving as an advisory role.

"Mining companies negotiate directly with the community involved. And the Cree Nation Government is part of the discussion, to help give guidance. But all the benefits go towards the community."

He also notes that deals are most often voted on within communities, allowing members to analyze the proposed agreements.

Blacksmith observes that mining projects are inherently short-term. Companies come in, mine the resource, and then leave once it is exhausted. He worries that governments will make long-term funding changes to communities based on payments that may only last a few years.

"I don't know why they developed this law? It is a very funny situation. I think the government is just trying to take away more money from the First Nations," said Blacksmith.

The legislation will take two years to come into force. And Backsmith says it should be modified.

"I haven't heard anything on the level of the Cree Nation Government. But it is something they have to look at for the future."

The Mining Association of Canada (MAC) and several NGOs, which hope to clean up Canada's poor reputation for unethical and corrupt mining companies, first proposed the measure.

But according to Pierre Gratton, president and CEO of the MAC, both his organization and the NGOs opposed extending the legislation to Canadian First Nations.

"We actually discussed with the NGOs that very issue right at the beginning. And we all agreed that was too complex and would require extensive consultation we don't have the capacity to do," said Gratton in an article published in Northern Ontario Business.

"I don't know why they developed this law? It is a very funny situation. I think the government is just trying to take away more money from the First Nations."

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QAT and Sépaq sign five-year deal

An agreement signing between Quebec Aboriginal Tourism (QAT) and the Société des établissements de plein air du Québec (Sépaq) on June 29 aims at increasing the visibility of Quebec's 11 First Nations in the parks and wildlife tourism industry.

The two parties agreed to share their respective areas of expertise and to further develop and promote Aboriginal tourism.

"Aboriginal tourism experiences – whether traditional or contemporary – have a high appeal factor, especially with foreign customers," explained QAT executive director Dave Laveau. "The number of Aboriginal enterprises catering to tourists from around the world has almost doubled over the past 15 years."

The agreement will also open the doors for new opportunities across Quebec for authentic Aboriginal enterprises to come to the table bringing further growth to the north.

Innus block access to La Romaine project

The Innu community of Nutashkuan erected a blockade July 15 barring access to the construction site of the Romaine hydroelectric complex on the north shore of Quebec.

Citing ongoing frustration and outrage with the actions of Hydro-Québec and the indifference of the provincial government, the community decided to take action to defend its traditional territory. The community is demanding a meeting with Quebec Premier Philippe Couillard.

"By flooding our territories, Hydro-Québec is violating not only our ancestral rights but also undermining our socio-economic development and damaging the ecosystem. Our patience has reached its limit," said Natashquan Chief Rodrigue Wapistan.

Chief Wapistan noted that flooding of Innu lands without notifying the community and the fact Hydro-Québec left half the forest standing in the flood basin are direct violations of the Nanemessu-Nutashkuan partnership agreement signed in 2008.

Nutashkuan is located at the mouth of the Natashquan River on the Gulf of Saint Lawrence, 336 kilometers east of Sept-Îles, and is home to over 1000 Innu.

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A man who left his mark

Friends and colleagues say goodbye to Lawrence Jimiken

by Amy German

On July 4, the Cree Nation lost another member of the team that negotiated the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement and would continue to play an influential role in the development of Eeyou Istchee.

At the time of his death, Lawrence Clarence Jimiken held the position of Returning Officer for the Grand Council of the Crees. *The Nation* spoke to him often during late-night waits for election results over the years. He was a big part of that experience, sharing his knowledge of technical details and a deep understanding of Cree history.

We will miss him.

***

Do All Things Useful and Necessary

On Thursday, July 9, the Cree Nation put to rest Lawrence Clarence Jimiken, who passed away suddenly in his hotel room in Val-d'Or the weekend before.

Lawrence was born in Old Nemaska to Louisa Jimiken and Billy Ottereyes on September 28, 1949. He was the husband of Frances Wapachee and the father of Trevor, Raymond and Lorraine and he was also the grandfather of Brendan Jimiken. Lawrence grew up hunting around Nemaska Lake. His mother lost the use of one foot in childhood and got around hunting, cutting wood and caring for her family using a crutch to which she attached a snowshoe during the winter. Her extraordinary life served as an example to Lawrence and indeed all of her children as well as to all who knew her.

Lawrence attended residential school and was picked up every year and flown to Moose Factory, Brantford and later Sault Ste. Marie. It was in residential school that Lawrence met Billy Diamond and Ted Moses. In spite of the adversities of those schools, Lawrence became very fluent in English and maintained his high level of fluency in the Cree language throughout his life. While the other students were off playing sports, Lawrence was reading or completing the latest Gazette crossword puzzle. He became renowned in the Cree world for his encyclopedic

knowledge of English, the Bible and of most of whatever he had read. He was not the best hockey player but Lawrence could walk. While at Sault Ste. Marie there was a walkathon organized which Lawrence won by walking 50 miles. "He left the rest of us in the dust," recalled former Grand Chief Ted Moses. "We were surprised at how fast he was."

After Lawrence finished secondary school and returned home, he found that the Old Post at Nemaska was closed. In 1970, the Jimiken family moved to Waskaganish at the mouth of the Rupert River, where Lawrence met his wife-to-be, Frances.

In 1972, the James Bay Hydroelectric Project was publicly announced. At that time, James Bay Quebec – or "Eeyou Istchee" as the Crees call their homeland – was isolated from the rest of the world. Roads, forestry and mining had only penetrated to southern areas. The only occupation for most of the communities was hunting and trapping and the families spent most of their time in the bush trapping furs and selling them to the Hudson Bay Company when they moved to the coast for the spring and summer.

When the time came to fight for the people's rights, Lawrence was drafted as the spokesperson for Nemaska and Waskaganish. He also went to Moose Factory to inform the east-coasters who lived there of the progress in the court case and the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement.

Lawrence was always a supporter of the local people. As chief, Lawrence fought to rebuild Nemaska on a new site and when he was re-elected in the 1990s having experienced the slow progress of implementing the James Bay Agreement he made common cause with all of the communities to resist James Bay II. He also served as the electoral officer for the various referenda that were later held to approve the new agreements and it was Lawrence who coined the phrase for the directives passed by local councils and the Grand Council that those receiving the directions do "all things useful and necessary" to carry out the directive.

When hydroelectric development came to his community, Lawrence participated in the discussions with Hydro-Québec at the negotiation table and later he was an important member of the Monitoring Committee that oversaw the numerous studies that were done on everything from design issues to the impacts of the proposed Eastmain 1A–Rupert Diversion-Sarcelles project.

He was a perceptive interlocutor for his community and a stubborn fighter for his cause. When the project was finished his community chose him to be the Nemaska representative on the Rupert River Water Management Board so he could continue to watch over the evolution of the river and the use made of it by his people.

Those who knew Lawrence will always appreciate him for what he was: a home-grown boy with a biting sense of humour, a penchant for knowledge and a love for the land and his people.

Lawrence Jimiken will be missed by all of us.

– Matthew Coon Come

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I remembered all the times we shared and talked over coffee and his cigarette. He would mumble and it took a special ear to understand him. When you did, you knew this man was a genius. Lawrence had incredible knowledge, wisdom and a photographic memory. I would always be surprised to hear the exact year and date of meetings from the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s and who said what! I never knew this was humanly possible! His contribution to the community of Nemaska and other organizations won't be forgotten and his insightful input will be missed. I will miss him. Rest in His peace my friend.

– Joshua Iserhoff

***

Lawrence was part of the original James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement negotiations team. He was a very young man at the time; I saw the pictures of him from back then, he had long hair.

I really think he did a lot for his community of Nemaska. At the time they were negotiating for their village and he was very involved in all aspects of this development. I think that the community will miss him very much, particularly when it comes to his negotiations skills.

– Jack Blacksmith

***

I have known Lawrence since childhood, we are cousins. He was a little older than me and when we were at the Old Post, he was one of the very few who spoke English and so that is how I remember him very clearly.

He was one of the first people who went out to residential school and then shortly thereafter we started going until we left the Old Post back in 1970.

When I knew Lawrence in the beginning we used to call him a bookworm because he was constantly reading. He would always bring a lot of books home and was very adamant about reading and was a speed-reader. He could read a pocket book in just a few hours and tell you the whole story. He had a photographic memory.

Larry Linton once handed him a Bible and he read it in three days. Larry then asked him questions about it and Lawrence knew everything.

He was also very active in the development of new community of Nemaska.

We will miss him.

– Thomas Jolly

Sounds of a proud nation

Kahnawake powwow attracts thousands

by Amy German

While Mohawks at Kanesatake held a sombre march to remember the 25th anniversary of the Oka Crisis, thousands poured into nearby Kahnawake to revel and stomp at the Echoes of A Proud Nation Powwow, an event created in 1991 to show cultural pride and a friendly face after the events of the previous year.

On July 11-12, thousands of locals and tourists mingled with dance competitors from across Quebec and beyond, many decked out in their finest traditional regalia.

Long line-ups stretched throughout the food tents as people looked to get a taste of the walleye nuggets, Indian Tacos, deer burgers, wild-rice salad, fry-bread delights and smoked-game sausages, all washed down with the strawberry juice that is practically synonymous with this event.

Despite the intense July sun beating down on the event, sending temperatures soaring above 35°C when the cloud cover would depart, merchants, schools, local organizations, newspapers, artisans and craft-sellers lined the event.

Nakuset, the Executive Director of the Native Women's Shelter of Montreal, manned a table to talk about the shelter's needs, programs and fundraisers. Also at the table were representatives from Batshaw Youth and Family Services, which is engaged in a joint endeavour with the NWSM to find Indigenous families for Native foster children.

Nakuset said this year they had a new program that they were running for Indigenous youth in foster care called Iohahi:Oi, which is being run by summer student Larissa States.

"We are trying to recruit volunteer Aboriginal mentors who are over 18, well-rounded and stable to pair up with Aboriginal children in the foster-care system. The idea is to take the children to cultural activities and also to inspire them and give them a break that is stress free," said States

"She is doing an excellent job," said Nakuset. "We have her for the summer but I am trying to get another trainee student to come and do this for the rest of the year because the kids in care really need this. They need mentors."

Nakuset said that at the moment they are also looking to expand the services offered to youth in Batshaw, that they now have a family care worker and that they are trying to get a family court worker for those kids.

"Often these kids will go into non-Aboriginal homes and so that is always a concern, we are really just trying to make sure that things are culturally appropriate for them. We are always

looking for Aboriginals to become foster parents too and so that is one of the reasons we are sitting here together" said Nakuset.

CKUT's Native Solidarity News host Irkar Beljaars, who is Mohawk, was taking in the sights and sounds. As a Montreal resident, Beljaars looks forward to this annual event because it allows him to celebrate his culture among his people.

"The grand entry (of the dancers) was just awesome and I am just full of pride today. I have my Mohawk haircut going on and wearing my Mohawk t-shirt. I am a Mohawk and I am proud of it. This is like a big family reunion for me," said Beljaars.

Manning his own table of breathtaking stained-glass products, Lee Riley of Wapo Island, near Windsor, Ontario, said he only sells his work at the handful of powwows and not online.

"I used to paint and then I transitioned into this," said Riley. "Sometimes I like to blend the two."

Akwesasne's Ryan Hill, who was selling intricately carved stone creations, said his lifelong passion began when he was given a knife at a young age and began to whittle his own wood carvings.

"I fell in love with carving as a child. At nine, I was given my first soapstone to carve and by 15, I sold my first piece. Since then, I have just kept it up. I've had other jobs over the years, but this kept calling me back," said Hill, whose work can be seen on his "Rock Studio I" Facebook page.

Among the dancers taking a break from the excruciating heat were John and his son who had come from Kitigan Zibi to participate in their first competitive event.

"Though I don't really believe in competition powwows, I took a number and if I place, I place," said John. "And though it's really hot today, everyone is so nice here."

The Echoes of a Proud Nation Powwow is held in mid-July every summer, much to the delight of the thousands who make the annual pilgrimage to Kahnawake.

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Lost at sea

Waskaganish family wonders if remains found in Hannah Bay belong to their father

by Jesse Staniforth

Peter Hester was last seen clinging to a five-gallon drum, trying to stay afloat in Hannah Bay after high winds and waves capsized the canoe he was travelling in with his friend Billy Shecapio. That was 1979. But now, after years of waiting, it seems like the family might get the news they've been hoping for: that Hester's remains have been found and can be laid to rest.

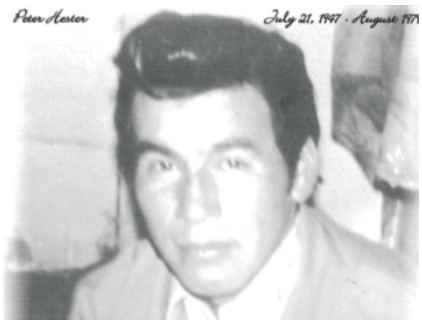
Pauline Hester was five years old when her father died. Originally from Waskaganish but relocated to Moose Factory, the Hester family was back in Eeyou Istchee in August of 1979 visiting friends and family when Peter and Billy set out across the bay to Moose Factory and Moosonee to pick up supplies.

"They were supposed to come back the next day," Pauline said. "But they didn't come back. On their way back from Moose Factory, they had a boat accident. I don't know exactly what happened."

Her husband Charles Hester (from a different branch of the Hester family) says the boat was overloaded and was swamped in the choppy waves. Billy Shecapio was able to survive by holding on to the wreck, which was anchored and gradually came closer to land as the tide went out.

"Billy tried to rescue Peter by throwing him a rope," said Charles. "But it was too far, he couldn't get to him. That was the last time he saw Peter. I guess the tide took him out in the bay."

Charles adds that if something like that happened today, there would be an enormous search and rescue team coordinated by Public Safety and the Eeyou Eenou police, who would likely work weeks or months before giving up.



"But at that time, the Cree communities weren't set up," he said. "So they just did a limited search."

Last May, Waskaganish hunters finally stumbled across a skull in Hannah Bay, and not long after, the Ontario Provincial Police contacted Charles and Pauline. They already knew, however: they were eating dinner in the Waskaganish Lodge when the hunters returned and one of them came in to find them.

"He said that him and his friends found a skull, and they gave it to police," Charles recalled. "The hunter was about the same age as Peter, so I think he hoped it was Peter's, too, so the family could put the remains to rest and close this chapter of not knowing and all the things that come with it."

Two months later, they got the call from the OPP. However, initial DNA testing did not provide any information the police could use, so they sent the skull to be tested at a second lab with more sophisticated equipment. That brought back the first piece of information: the skull was from a person who died around 1979.

"Some people from Moose Factory have said they were thinking of other people who got lost in the bay, where the remains were never found," Charles said. "Even from Waskaganish, there was an older gentleman from our neighbourhood who lost his life on the bay. But most of the other ones happened in the 1980s."

Police told them to contact their local police department, who would arrange a meeting to get DNA samples from Peter's surviving siblings and his children. They have now spoken with the police and are waiting for the specific arrangements about when and how this will take place.

"A lot of people around town, friends and family of people, they all hope these are Peter's remains, and they get closure," Charles said.

It's been a long wait for answers, especially for Pauline's older siblings, who were in their teenage years when they lost their father, and for her mother, Annie Visitor.

"When she was told about this she'd already thought about it and picked out everybody who was going to be part of the memorial service, who was going to be singing the song, giving the message," Charles said. "It shows that she's been preparing for this for several years."

But even the process of testing takes a long time – it's been nearly a year since the OPP first contacted the Hesters, and they would like very much to get the final answers they've been waiting for.

"The whole family is really eager to find out," Pauline said, "We're hoping it's him: we've been waiting 35 years now. What some of my family members are saying is if it's really him, they're going to stop looking. Every time they go down south, they look for our father. He didn't drown, he's still alive, he's around somewhere. Every time they see somebody that resembles him, they think it's him. But if this is really him, they can finally stop looking for our dad."

The Hester family

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William Nicholls
Editor in Chief
The Nation

Cave-inn

Ceiling collapse at the Val-d'Or Quality Inn injures two Cree guests

by Jeremy East

What began as a quiet morning at Val-d'Or's Quality Inn Hotel July 7 abruptly turned chaotic for two Crees when a hallway ceiling near the lobby unexpectedly collapsed on top of them.

Robbie Tapiatic and Stella Masty Bearskin, both from Chisasibi, had just run into each other at the partly Cree-owned hotel. Things seemed normal as they chatted, when there was a sudden cracking sound and a large section of ceiling came crashing down.

"I screamed, time just seemed to stand still," said Masty Bearskin. "I was in complete and utter shock. I couldn't respond to people talking at first, but I could hear them. It took a while to react."

Hotel management said the incident involved a section of ceiling 3 feet wide and 21 feet long. It covered an entire section of the hallway. The falling debris included a wooden frame, moulding, wires and tiles.

"I remember Robbie grabbing my arm," Masty Bearskin said. "I don't know if I was about to fall or not, but one of the Elders came out and pulled the debris from my face and head, dusted me off and hugged me. I saw the look of concern in their eyes."

That concern, Masty Bearskin says, did not seem to be shared by the hotel's staff. She alleges that the manager's initial reaction was to voice his need to call the hotel's insurance company. When Masty Bearskin asked the staff for ice to reduce the swelling on her head, she did not receive any.

"It was only a few minutes later that the manager asked us if we were okay. After, he asked me if I needed to go to the hospital. I don't even remember answering him, I was in shock and on the brink of tears."

Masty Bearskin said she had pain in her elbow, ears and foot, as well as cuts from the falling metal and glass. Tapiatic and Masty Bearskin headed to the hospital to receive medical attention. She was diagnosed with a mild concussion.

The Quality Inn, which is partially owned by CREECO, has won numerous hospitality awards and is considered by many Crees to be a home away from home in Val-d'Or. Hotel Manager Michael Prince says that the clients' safety was the top concern when the accident occurred.

"The hotel sincerely apologizes to everyone that was affected by the accident," Prince told *the Nation*. "What's most important to us is that our clients are safe and taken care of."

Prince says engineers were called in immediately after the collapse to identify the cause of the accident and ensure that there were no structural issues with any of the building's other ceilings. He says the cause of the collapse was determined to be faulty installation when the hotel was built four years ago. It has been identified as an isolated case.

At press time, Masty Bearskin had plans to see two additional specialists to assess the extent of her injuries. She has not decided whether she will return to stay at the Quality Inn.

"It was always my first choice (in Val-d'Or)," she said. "The people at the front desk were always very kind to me, they knew me by my first name, so I would really have to think about that."

photo: Bruce R.R. Matthew.

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AFN chiefs gather at critical juncture

A hostile government, missing women, residential schools report and a looming election dominate a busy agenda at annual general assembly

by Joshua Grant

"Closing the Gap: Building Nations, Asserting Sovereignty" was the theme of this year's annual general assembly of the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), which focused on how to transform the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the UN Declaration of Human Rights into meaningful change for Canada's Indigenous peoples.

National Chief Perry Bellegarde said it is time for Canada to seize an opportunity offered by the TRC final report to improve the relationship with all First Nations.

"The legacy of the residential schools does not end with the suffering and the damage done throughout more than 100 years of abuse," Bellegarde declared. "Because with that promise of reconciliation comes an opportunity to rebuild this country, in a manner that our ancestors envisioned. Reconciliation means honouring those original promises and restoring that original relationship to one based on respect and recognition of our title and rights. Governments must respect our right to determine what happens in our traditional territories."

The 36th annual event took place in Montreal July 7-9. Delegates heard from a variety of community chiefs, federal political leaders and guest speakers. Among the hot discussion topics in breakout sessions were mobilizing the Native vote in October's federal election, missing and murdered Indigenous women and the road to reconciliation for First Nations communities and individuals.

A presentation by Truth and Reconciliation commissioners Chief Wilton Littlechild and Dr. Marie Wilson underlined their view that the TRC's 94 recommendations should be seen as calls to action. Dr. Wilson also noted the importance of sustained public education of the realities and legacy of the residential school system in Canada.

Chief Littlechild outlined some of the recommendations, including parenting programs focused on child welfare, culturally based early childhood education, concerted efforts to reclaim Indigenous identity (both individual names and traditional territories) and the importance of healthcare rights and cultural training for healthcare providers. Littlechild also mentioned the TRC's calls to implement a National Day of Reconciliation, build residential school monuments, reduce the number of Indigenous youth in custody, create support programs for inmates, recognize and support Indigenous athletes and sports programs and continue to develop Indigenous justice systems.

"In conclusion," said Littlechild, "reconciliation will require the leadership and sustained efforts of the Assembly of First Nations and the continuous efforts of Indigenous and public leaders working together."

Given the Harper government's complete indifference to the TRC report and its recommendations, a focus on mobilizing traditionally reluctant First Nations voters to help elect a friendlier government was a logical conclusion.

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"As Canadians consider their future in this election year, it is essential that we capture their imagination and we share with them what strong and healthy First Nations people will mean for this country," Bellegarde said. "We will make progress when more Canadians realize that First Nations need to be lifted out of poverty, empowered to deliver our own education and live in healthy homes with clean water and the same basic healthcare that all Canadians enjoy."

Indeed, one session focused on how to improve the fiscal relationship with the federal government and create revenue sharing to ensure that the same level of services enjoyed by all Canadians are finally delivered to Aboriginal communities. In particular, the panel stressed the need to remove the Conservative government's 2% cap on federal funding increases for essential services.

Following Bellegarde's speech, the AFN general assembly continued with a panel on mobilizing the Native vote. Panelists outlined voting requirements, how to secure proper identification and the opportunity First Nations have to exercise their influence in the election. Thomas Mulcair, leader of the New Democratic Party, and Liberal leader Justin Trudeau each took to the stage to share their visions of federal relations with First Nations communities.

Mulcair told the audience that the NDP is committed to a new era based on a nation-to-nation relationship. "A new era starts with listening and an understanding that 'meaningful consultation and accommodation' isn't just a catch phrase," he said.

Mulcair said a NDP government would swiftly address education underfunding, respect treaty rights and restore environmental protection. He also assured delegates that a national inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women would be established within 60 days of taking office, while consulting with First Nations on the recommendations of the TRC. The NDP leader also said his government would repeal Bill C-51 in its entirety.

Trudeau, like Mulcair, was quick to attack Stephen Harper and the Conservative government's multiple failures on First Nations issues. "We need to recognize that ours was a nation forged without the meaningful participation of our Aboriginal peoples," Trudeau observed. "Harper's legacy includes government-led legislation that demonstrates a striking and shocking lack of understanding of what is needed to move beyond the Indian Act and the paternalistic 'Ottawa knows best' approach to governance."

While Trudeau said the Liberals support certain "security" elements of Bill C-51, he was quick to note that parts of the bill must be repealed, mentioning that Indigenous peoples fighting for their rights and freedoms should never be branded as terrorists. He too, promised to work with Aboriginal peoples across the country to implement the recommendations of the TRC.

Day two of the AFN assembly kicked off with a discussion on the role Indigenous communities play in protecting the environment and opportunities for sustainable energy development on First Nation territories.

Chris Henderson, author of *Aboriginal Power* and a clean energy advisor for over a dozen Indigenous communities, spoke about the future of renewable energy and 60 projects already underway across Canada. "If they are invested in," Henderson declared, "hydroelectricity, wind, geothermal, solar and biomass energy can be bigger than any other industry and help heal communities."

Henderson is the program designer for the 20/20 Catalysts Program, which pairs young Métis, Inuit and First Nations with mentors to develop the skills they need to lead clean energy projects in their communities.

A strategy session on missing and murdered Indigenous women heard heart-wrenching stories from women who have lost sisters, daughters and friends. Key areas of focus remain prevention and

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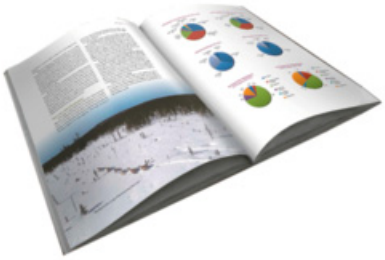

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awareness, community safety, policing and justice. The AFN is committed to continue to press for a national inquiry and is also pushing for a national prevention and awareness campaign to change attitudes that devalue Indigenous women and girls.

A passionate speech from former Prime Minister Paul Martin addressed recent successes in First Nations education. He noted the successful literacy and entrepreneurship initiatives implemented in almost 50 Aboriginal schools over the last couple years. Martin said that when there is adequate funding, a culturally relevant curriculum, parental involvement and community support, First Nations students are able to attain and surpass national academic averages.

Ultimately, the AFN assembly adopted 44 resolutions, among them support for the full implementation of the TRC's calls to action, revitalization of Indigenous languages, action for missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, and the creation of an Indigenous national DNA database.

The major highlight of the AGA was a rousing address by environmentalist icon David Suzuki, who pulled no punches describing the unfolding ecological disaster caused by current resource and economic policies.

"The forests are burning, the rain is not falling, huge algae blooms are choking the oceans and carbon levels in the atmosphere are now at catastrophic, unprecedented levels," Suzuki told delegates. "I don't believe that we lack for solutions to our global crisis. The critical hurdle is not economic, it's not technological; it's not even political. It is psychological. It is the way that we see the world.

"We're one species, but we see the world through perceptual lenses that are shaped by gender, ethnicity, religion, social class and so on. And for me, the major clash of these perceptual lenses is between Indigenous perspectives and urban, industrial society around the world. Your struggle for dignity, for recognition of sovereignty over land, for your millennia-old cultures is my struggle for my grandchildren. You are leading my battle, the battle of all who care about a future for the coming generations and I support you all the way."

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A gathering of heroes

Montreal's annual Comiccon offers something special for everyone

by Joshua Grant

Call them geeks, freaks, or any of the stereotypical monikers applied to those who obsess over and identify with the characters in comics, fantasy TV shows, sci-fi movies or role-playing games. It doesn't matter to them: the organizers and fans of the 2015 Montreal Comiccon all know how to have a good time.

Between July 3-5 at the Palais des congrès, superheroes and villains of all shapes, sizes and gender roles had the chance to show off their costume-making – or "cosplay" – skills and fly their true colours, free from judgment. While some chose not dress up, the 7th annual edition of the Montreal event offered all kinds of treats to more than 50,000 attendees.

Costume vendors, video-game testing, collections of rare comics, artists, booths of *Star Wars* look-alikes and life-size replicas of the *Mad Max: Fury Road* car and the DeLorean time machine from Back to the Future were all on display. Not to mention the festival's centrepiece attraction: meet-and-greets with some of the biggest names in film and television as well as autographs, pictures and Q & A sessions with celebrities from around the world.

This year's special event was "An Evening with Kevin Smith." The writer, director and actor (*Jay and Silent Bob*, among other quirky cult favourites) shared stories of life in the industry with a large crowd. Other guests of honour were Ron Perlman from the *Hellboy* comic and *Sons of Anarchy* TV series; John Barrowman of *Doctor Who*, *Arrow* and *Torchwood*; and Billie Piper and Karen Killann, also of the re-launched *Doctor Who* series.

Others included Gwendoline Christie from *Game of Thrones, Star Wars: Episode VII* and *The Hunger Games*; Jason Momoa of *Aquaman*; Graham McTavish from *The Hobbit*; Hayley Atwell of *Avengers: Age of Ultron*; Giancarlo Esposito from *Breaking Bad*; Josh McDermitt of *The Walking Dead*; and Montreal Gazette editorial cartoonist Terry Mosher, known by his nom de plume, Aislin.

Barrowman made his appearance in a *Star Trek* dress – apparently purchased earlier that day – and proceeded to prance around stage and pose on a leather couch before donning jeans and a t-shirt. The hilariously flamboyant and witty singer, dancer and actor fielded questions that ranged from flirtatious to curious to awkward. At one point, he allowed a fan to approach the stage and snap a photo, something strictly forbidden for everyone in the audience.

"We get paid a lot to do this," Barrowman said, pushing past his allotted time limit. "But believe me, from the bottom of my heart, we were all fans just like you at one point and we couldn't do this without your love and support."

Wandering around the convention, soaking in the fun-loving atmosphere of "badass" costumes and extravagant displays, it was tough not to crack a smile every few seconds. The pride and excitement of cosplay enthusiasts exclaiming "Sure!" every time you asked them to stop for a photo shows that Comiccon offers those who tend to shy away from attention an opportunity to step into the spotlight and celebrate their heroes for three days of fun and thrills.

Cree-Quebec forestry agreement signed

Parties come to terms on Baril-Moses dispute and Broadback protection

by Jeremy East

A nation-to-nation forestry agreement has led the Grand Council of the Crees to shelve a multimillion-dollar lawsuit against the Quebec government, but not all Crees are satisfied with the terms reached by the two parties.

Signed on July 12 in Quebec City by Grand Chief Matthew Coon Come and Premier Philippe Couillard, the agreement puts an end to a years-long dispute over controversial forestry practices east of Mistissini and Oujé-Bougoumou.

The Grand Council accused the government of unlawfully authorizing in 2010 clear-cutting on a 7245-square-kilometre parcel of land that is home to 14 Cree traplines. Those traditional hunting grounds were supposed to fall under the protection of the 2002 Baril-Moses Agreement.

Under the new agreement, the Baril-Moses forestry standards will be restored in that territory for the next five years. This means Cree hunting, fishing and wildlife habitat will be protected during that time. After that a new forestry plan – to be devised by a task force made up of Cree, Innu and Quebec government representatives – will be implemented in 2020.

"We are taking yet another significant step today in the nation-to-nation relations between Quebec and the Cree," said Couillard at the signing. "To ensure sustainable northern development, our priorities must include environmental protection throughout our territory, including the protection of forests and the preservation of endangered species such as the woodland caribou."

The agreement will also create a new framework for the preservation of boreal forests in the Broadback region that protects the threatened woodland caribou. A 9135-square-km area around the Broadback River is to be designated as a protected area, where forestry of any kind is not permitted.

While Crees in Mistissini and Oujé-Bougoumou celebrated protection for the Baril-Moses forests, community members in Waswanipi maintain that the agreement – specifically the new protection in the Broadback area – doesn't go far enough.

Already several years into a struggle to increase protection in the Broadback Valley, the Waswanipi council had tabled a request to the Cree Nation Government that their campaign not be included in the new agreement. They were informed that this was not possible. Now, the agreement has been signed and the council says community members are not satisfied with the protected area's location, which is further north than they had hoped.

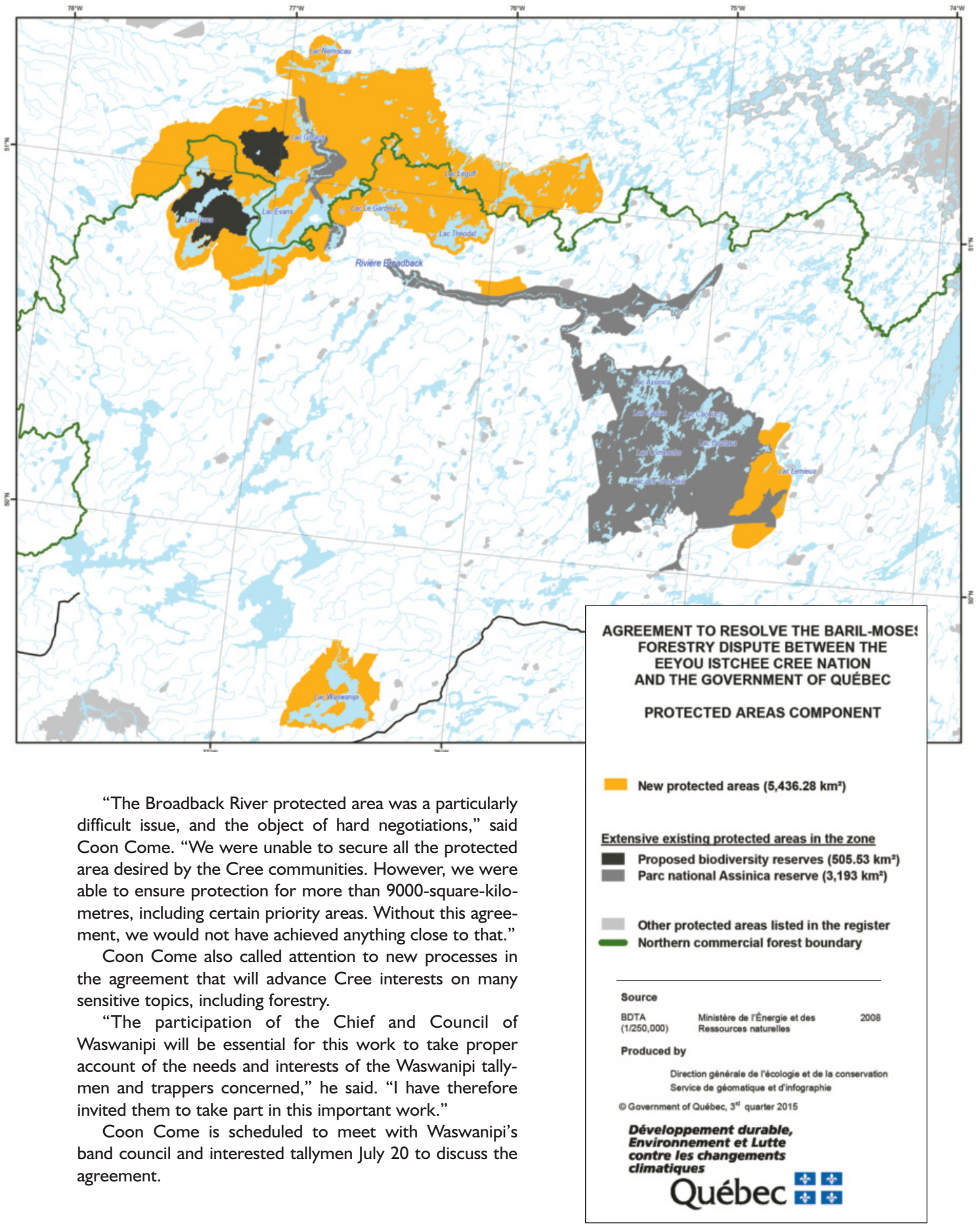
"We wanted to ensure the protection of the entire Broadback River Valley, both the north and the south," said Waswanipi Deputy Chief Mandy Gull. "A lot of the northern protected areas are quite a distance away from the Broadback Valley. Some of the areas that were protected weren't requested, and important southern areas are left open and vulnerable."

Gull noted that roughly half of the 9135-square-km protected zone is located above the northern commercial forest boundary, meaning those areas were already protected from forest development. Gull says the southern regions of the Broadback that have been left unprotected are also more vulnerable to mining exploration than the northern regions because they are more accessible.

In a possible attempt to ease Waswanipi's concerns, the newly signed agreement includes a joint letter from Couillard offering "meaningful discussions" with the Grand Council on further protection status in the Broadback area. Gull says people in her community remain sceptical.

"Complete protection was our first goal," said Gull. "This agreement only gives us a part of that. We support the recognition that Mistissini and Oujé-Bougoumou gained. Clear-cutting is not conducive to the Cree way of life and there is no community that should have their traplines subject to it. That being said, our community members felt that the protected areas in the Broadback should have been a separate issue from the Baril-Moses dispute."

But Coon Come describes the agreement as more of a beginning than an end. In an email to *the Nation*, he explained the Cree Government's position on the Broadback dispute.


AGREEMENT TO RESOLVE THE BARIL-MOSES FORESTRY DISPUTE BETWEEN THE EEYOU ISTCHEE CREE NATION AND THE GOVERNMENT OF QUÉBEC
PROTECTED AREAS COMPONENT
New protected areas (5,436.28 km²)
Extensive existing protected areas in the zone
Proposed biodiversity reserves (505.53 km²)
Parc national Assinica reserve (3,193 km²)
Other protected areas listed in the register
Northern commercial forest boundary
Source
BDTA (1/250,000) Ministère de l'Énergie et des Ressources naturelles 2008
Produced by
Direction générale de l'écologie et de la conservation
Service de géomatique et d'infographie
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Développement durable, Environnement et Lutte contre les changements climatiques
Québec

"The Broadback River protected area was a particularly difficult issue, and the object of hard negotiations," said Coon Come. "We were unable to secure all the protected area desired by the Cree communities. However, we were able to ensure protection for more than 9000-square-kilometres, including certain priority areas. Without this agreement, we would not have achieved anything close to that."

Coon Come also called attention to new processes in the agreement that will advance Cree interests on many sensitive topics, including forestry.

"The participation of the Chief and Council of Waswanipi will be essential for this work to take proper account of the needs and interests of the Waswanipi tallymen and trappers concerned," he said. "I have therefore invited them to take part in this important work."

Coon Come is scheduled to meet with Waswanipi's band council and interested tallymen July 20 to discuss the agreement.

Winning the race against cancer

Mistissini man runs 345 km to raise research funds after beating the disease

by Amy German

Mistissini's Patrice Dominique, an Innu originally from Mashteuiatsh (Pointe-Bleu), ran a total of 342 kilometres between the two communities in late June to raise over $3000 for the Canadian Cancer Society and celebrate his good health after recently beating the disease.

"I wanted to do this for myself. But then one of my friends said that I really should do it as a fundraiser, so I decided I would do it for the Canadian Cancer Society," said Dominique.

In the spring of 2013, Dominique said he began to feel unusually tired to the point that he was exhausted by routine spring-cleaning around the exterior of his home. A lifelong distance runner who could once push himself 48 hours straight, Dominique knew that something was definitely wrong and immediately sought medical help in Chibougamau.

"When I went they told me that I had very low iron levels and that I must be losing a lot of blood. They asked me if I was aware of it and I said I wasn't," said Dominique.

After undergoing a colonoscopy and a gastro-scope to determine how Dominique was losing blood, the doctor told him that he really didn't like what he saw. Biopsies performed a few weeks later led to a diagnosis of stage 3 rectal cancer.

Dominique said he was very lucky because all of his cancer was confined to the same area of the rectum, and hadn't metastasized. He was able to begin treatment a few weeks later at the hospital in Chicoutimi. Over the course of three months, he was treated with chemo, radiation before undergoing surgery in December 2013 to remove the remaining cancer tumour.

Triumphing over tragedy

Follow-up tests every few months confirmed the news that he is now cancer free. Doctors have credited his good health and athleticism to his rapid recovery.

A year and a half after his diagnosis, Dominique triumphantly hit the road for a run between his two hometowns.

"I ran from Mistissini to my hometown of Mashteuiatsh, which totals 342 km. The first day I did 90 km, I rested and then the next day I did 105 km. I took a break and then the following morning I ran another 95 km. On day four I finished the remaining 52 km," said Dominique.

Dominique trained for two and a half months to prepare, which wasn't a difficulty for the 52-year-old who has run long distances for most of his life. An enthusiast of ultra-marathons, Dominique said that before his illness he was easily capable of running for 12 consecutive hours with his record being about 48 hours running 265 km on a treadmill in Chibougamau seven years ago.

Support along the way

"People are really impressed with what I have gone through, that I was able to come back and keep running," said Dominique.

Moving cultures

Our annual rundown of the films of the First Peoples' Festival

by Jesse Staniforth

Montreal's festival season is in full swing, reaching a midsummer peak with the First People's Festival from July 29 to August 6, when it bridges the end of Just for Laughs and Osheaga (which finally announced a formal ban on Native feather headdresses!).

Over its eight days, the FPF straddles the line between a conference and a party, boasting musical acts like Kashtin legend Florent Vollant (performing with folksinger and environmental activist Richard Desjardins), art shows at various locations, seminars such as "Indigenous Media and Arts: from Apartheid to Hypervisibility" – and of course, a whole lot of movies.

Here are a few of this year's film and video highlights:

The Wolverine: The Fight of the James Bay Cree

Ernest Webb (Eeyou Istchee, 9 min)

This short film from Rezolution Pictures, by Nation co-founder Ernest Webb, will be a focal point at the festival. Last year, speaking to the Bureau des Audiences Publiques sur l'Environment (BAPE) hearings about the proposed Matoush uranium extraction project near Mistissini, Eastmain's Jamie Moses made a surprising statement. Instead of discussing the issue of uranium, or even raising any ecological threat, he simply spoke about his connection to the land – and then he told the story of the Wolverine and the Giant Skunk, a well-known Cree legend.

It was a breathtaking moment before the commission, one that turned the entire discussion about uranium and mining on its head and placed the focus where it belonged: on the land, the people and their history.

Webb was obviously paying close attention, as he's woven a recording of that statement into the narrative of this film. You'll hear Moses retelling the legend over scenes on the land, re-enactment of the events of the story, and artist Amanda T. Sam's visionary drawings of the legend. (Sam's drawings are breathtaking to begin with, but grow twice as amazing on learning that she did them with a broken hand.)

Antigone

Matt Keay (Canada, 44 min)

Though the idea of tragedy in the modern world comes to us from ancient Greece, Woodland Cree playwright Deanne Kasokeo believed it could be used to channel the pain of modern life on the rez. With that in mind, she adapted the Greek tragedy Antigone by Sophocles (dating back to 441 BC) to handle issues of modern life in post-colonial Canada.

The original play deals with ideas of loyalty and betrayal, following a sister trying to bury her brother who died a traitor, and – in true tragic fashion – ends in multiple suicides. Adapting it for modern Saskatchewan, Kasokeo spared no attacks on the racism of colonial Canadians or on the corruption of Indigenous leaders, whom she sees as tools of the colonial state. While the adapted version of the play was wildly popular on its release in Regina in 1998, in 2011 the play was banned outright from the Poundmaker First Nation, 200 km north of Saskatoon.

Matt Keay's documentary explores Kasokeo's adaptation and the trouble it caused in the Poundmaker community, interviewing Kasokeo and the actors involved in the play, and placing it in the context of ongoing Indigenous issues both on reserve and across Canada.

Legend of the Storm
Roxann Whitebean (Kahnawake Mohawk Territory, 16 min)
Kahnawake director Roxann Whitebean's dreamlike short film is "Dedicated to the Children of War," and begins with a specific reference to the Kanesatake/Oka Crisis in 1990. Strung together by a narrator who's simultaneously recounting events and telling the viewer something about them, the film follows a mother and her children who allegorically represent the experiences of those inside the besieged communities of Kahnawake and Kanesetake. Over a series of set-piece scenes, Whitebean explores emotions of threat and suffering mainly from the perspective of a pre-teen girl witnessing and experiencing violence while also attempting to maintain an atmosphere of normality at home.

Yvy Maraey: Land without Evil
(Yvy Maraey: tierra sin mal)
Juan Carlos Valdivia (Bolivia, 105 min)
Bolivian director Juan Carlos Valdivia's Yvy Maraey is a portrait of the clash of ideas that take place in the collision between Indigenous and settler cultures. Valdiva portrays Andres, a character very much like himself – a white film director who wishes to make a movie about the Indigenous Guarani peoples. He hires Guarani guide Yari (Elio Ortez) to introduce him to the culture and its people as they follow the path of a Swedish filmmaker who filmed the Guarani over a century ago.

During a journey through breathtaking mountain landscapes, Andres and Yari argue about issues of power, origins, identity and the desires of white people in a Native land. Andres is interested in the abstract: he wants to explore the Guarani legend of a "land without evil," which he is intent to locate. Yari, meanwhile, is focused on the present day: he fights to convince Andres that his concerns should be focused on preserving land and saving the Indigenous people who inhabit it, rather than on legends and ideas.

Yvy Maraey is a film of big (and sometimes pretentious) ideas and big images, stretching philosophical discussion across amazing shots of the enormous land of southeastern Bolivia.

Bloodlines
Christopher Nataanii Cegielski (Navajo Nation, 11 min)
A wolf has been killing the livestock and the family that lives on the ranch – two young brothers and their dour, abusive father – are at their breaking point in this short film by Arizona Navajo filmmaker Christopher Nataanii Cegielski. When their father fails to shoot the wolf, the boys steal his rifle while he's sleeping to hunt it down.

Bloodlines is an impressively quiet film: there are only three words in its 11 minutes. Instead, Cegielski encourages the viewer to think about the relationship between the people and the land, a hilly desert full of giant boulders. Like the wolf that is terrorizing their ranch, the landscape is both threatening and beautiful. For the two boys out hunting the wolf, the story comes down to deciding when something is too beautiful to die, or too threatening to live. The film was produced as Cegielski's senior thesis for his Bachelor of Fine Arts in film and has been touring festivals since last year.

Le Chemin Rouge
Thérèse Ottawa (Atikamekw Nation of Opitciwan, 15 min)
If you speak French, it's worth checking out Atikamekw director Thérèse Ottawa's moving documentary Le Chemin Rouge. The understated short film follows 21-year-old Tony Chachai, a powwow dancer from the Atikamekw community of Opitciwan who has found refuge from addiction in the culture and community of powwows. At the age of 18, a heavy drug and alcohol user, Tony was brought to a powwow by a friend and recognized immediately a culture to which he could belong and contribute. On the eve of becoming a father himself, Tony reflects on his mother, her addictions, and the impact her suffering had on his life, but also his ability to make things different for the next generation. The film is a testament to the power of powwow culture to bring suffering individuals back from the brink of self-destruction.

Sumé: The Sound of a Revolution
(Sumé: mumisitsinerup nipaa)
Inuk Silis Høegh (Greenland, 73 min)
The release last fall of the remarkably popular Native North America Vol. I compilation, bringing together Indigenous rock and country songs from the 1960s through the 1980s, was a critical success. Unheard for decades, suddenly songs by Eastmain's Lloyd Cheechoo and Mistissini's Morley Loon and Willie Mitchell were filling the airwaves and crossing the internet, alongside contemporaries like Alberta's Chieftones and Puvirnituq's Sikumiut. The collection was a reminder that even when music is forgotten, it doesn't lose its power to touch listeners – all it needs is ears.

At the same time Cheechoo and Loon and Mitchell were recording in and around Eeyou Istchee, Sumé was making records further east in Greenland. The first band to sing rock and roll and record in Greenlandic at a time when Greenland had few powers under its Danish rule, Sumé represented a spirit of rebellion against colonialism. This was made clear by the jacket of their first record, which showed an Inuit standing triumphant over a European corpse riddled with arrows.

The film reels through the archives to explore the history of the band, begun by four Greenlanders who met

while students in Denmark. Marking the political zeitgeist of early 1970s Denmark, Sumé released albums to Greenlandic and Danish acclaim for four brief years before calling it quits in 1977 – shortly before the establishment of a Home Rule government in Greenland. That win, in 1979, granted Greenlanders a certain degree of internal government, and many credited Sumé for helping build the culture of Greenlandic pride and ambition that led to its creation.

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Profit at what cost?

by Xavier Kataquapit

Many people may have heard of a major train derailment that occurred March 7 near Gogama, Ontario. There was earlier one February 14, also near Gogama. What many don't realize is just how traumatic this kind of disaster is for people living in the small town and in Mattagami First Nation. The March 7 derailment involved 94 tanker cars carrying crude oil from Alberta; 35 cars left the track and caused five tanker cars to fall into the Makami River, which leads into the Lake Mattagami watershed.

There were fires caused by both these derailments and it took days to put them out. The March 7 derailment fire actually had Mattagami First Nation and the town of Gogama on alert for evacuation.

In talking to my friends in Mattagami, I was relieved to find out that the Wabun Tribal Council, which Mattagami First Nation is part of, reacted quickly. Wabun Executive Director Shawn Batise, Chief Walter Naveau and the Mattagami First Nation Council activated a community crisis plan and met with Canadian National (CN) management officials to ensure the safety of community residents. They also affirmed their role in the managing, monitoring and cleanup of the spill.

As Chief Naveau pointed out, these spills have a devastating effect on the water and the land. Even though the cleanup has produced good results in the short term , nobody knows how serious contamination is. It could take years to determine the extent of the damage.

When these spills happen on the land and in particular on traditional lands of First Nation people, there is shock and sadness within the community. I know firsthand how the Elders understand the land. In their teachings, we are taught that everything is connected. All of life moves about on the land, in the water and in the skies. We believe this planet that we are living on is in fact a living breathing entity.

What seems to be just a simple spill to many people is far more serious in the eyes of First Nation people. Not long ago our ancestors lived and travelled on all these traditional lands in the north. The rivers and lakes were our highways and we drank from them, harvested fish from them and we also gathered food from the land to survive.

Back in those days before Indian reserves, my people roamed vast areas of land. We were nomadic and it was not uncommon for the people of the James Bay area to travel as far south as Mattagami and vice versa.

As Chief Naveau pointed out, First Nation people still live off the land and practice their traditional pursuits on their territories. When the land is damaged by spills or other mishaps it has a great effect on Native people nearby.

Although leaders like Chief Naveau understand the importance of economics, providing employment and business opportunities for people, he also believes that First Nation leaders are not prepared to think of profit at any cost. There has to be a balance between our taking from the land and generating economic benefits while at the same time taking care of the environment. In the long run, we will all suffer the consequences of not caring about our environment to the degree that we should.

The transportation of crude oil and other hazardous products by rail or pipeline has been happening for a long time and it is even more prevalent today. As Shawn Batise explained, First Nations are being asked to pick their poison, either transporting oil by rail or moving it by pipeline. Both options present the same problems in terms of accidental spills on the land and water.

One thing that both of these leaders are sure about is that there will continue to be disasters and spills in the future. First Nation leadership is developing preparedness for such disasters and they are lobbying government and corporations to put in place the ways and means to limit these calamities that end up causing us a lot of grief and aggravation. This land is our land.

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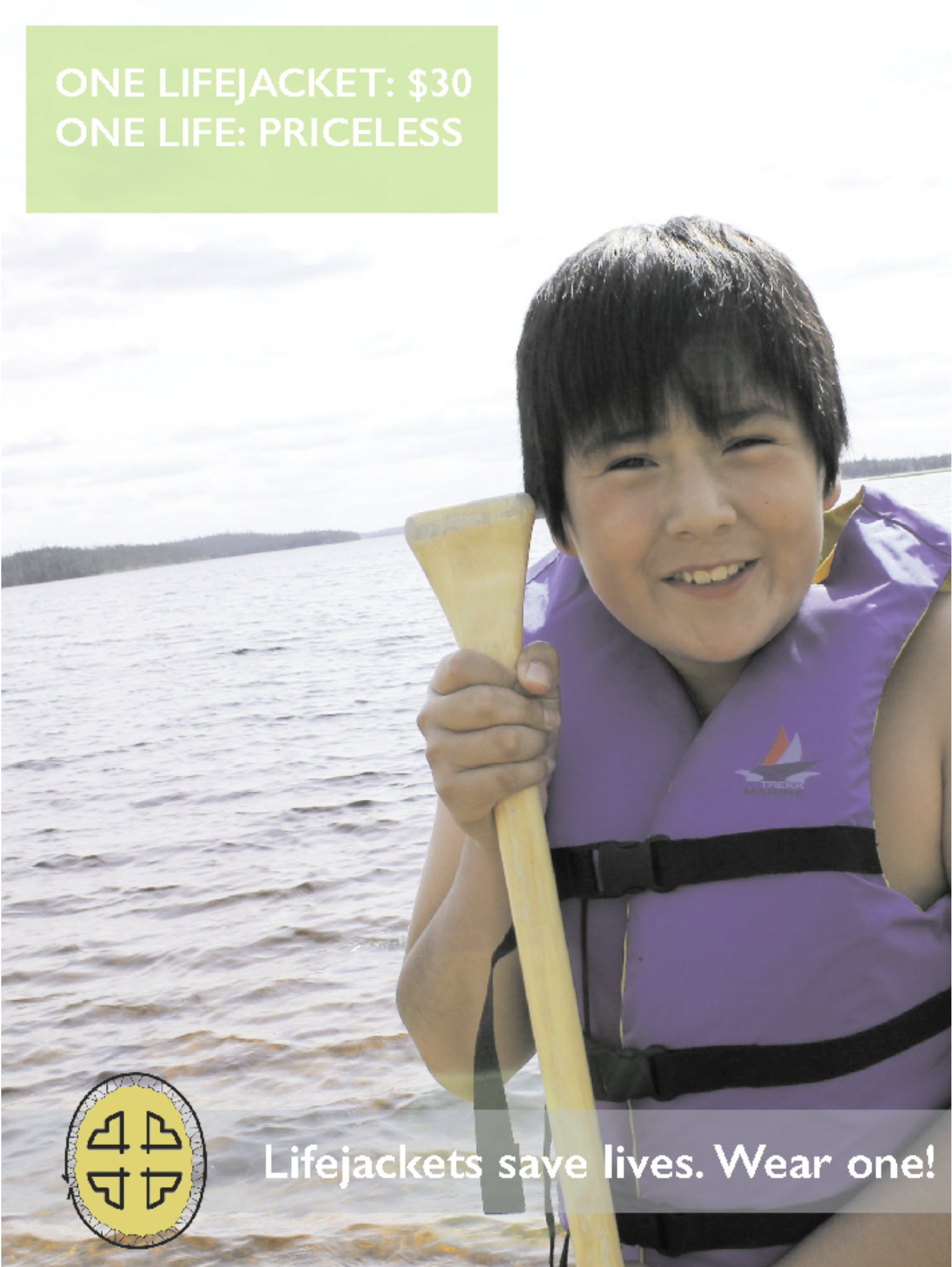

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